

We have a Priest

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[0 : 00] Now for our Bible reading, we're returning to the letter to the Hebrews. So you'll find the reading on page 1004.

We're going to read from chapter 6, verse 13 to the end of chapter 7. The author has said in 510 that Jesus is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and he broke off into a digression. I'll talk about that later.

And now he returns to this theme in our reading. So Hebrews chapter 6, verse 13. For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, Surely I will bless you and multiply you.

And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, that in all their disputes, an oath is final for confirmation.

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath. So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

[1 : 30] We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him. And to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by a translation of his name, king of righteousness. And then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God.

He continues a priest forever. See how great this man was, to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils. And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham.

But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.

[2 : 53] In one case, tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who received tithes, paid tithe through Abraham, for he was still on the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Now, if perfection had been attainable to the Levitical priesthood, but under it the people received the law, what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?

But when there is a change in priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belong to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar.

For it is evident that our Lord was ascended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe, Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident.

When another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

[4 : 06] For he has witnessed of him, you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. On the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness.

The law made nothing perfect. On the other hand, a better hope is introduced through which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were

made such without an oath.

But this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him, The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you are a priest forever.

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. Former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office. But Jesus holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever.

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

[5 : 18] He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a son who has been made perfect forever.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Now, if you turn back, please, to page 1004 into the passage we read, and we'll have a moment of prayer and ask the Lord's help.

Come now with prayer and supplication. See how in Scripture Christ is known. We ask, indeed, our Father, that we will see beyond the sacred page which fully and faithfully points to the Lord Christ, that we will see Christ himself.

Our prayer is that of those long ago who said, Sir, we want to see Jesus. That is our prayer tonight, and we ask that as we look at your word together, the gracious Holy Spirit will make that real to us.

[6 : 42] to our hearts and to our minds. And we ask this in the name of our great high priest, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amen. Now, I imagine if we were to ask, where do you find Christ in the Old Testament?

We'd have a number of passages up our sleeve, wouldn't we? Genesis 3, the descendant of the woman, will crush the head of the serpent. passages in Isaiah, of course, the Emmanuel, God with us, the child born, the son given.

And, of course, Isaiah 53, he was repised and rejected of men. And Psalm 22, the, Oh my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

I wonder why our author doesn't do that here. Why does he go to an obscure figure mentioned twice in the Old Testament?

That's something we, that is something which is very surprising, but it's not when you think of it. On the Emmaus Road, the Lord Jesus Christ unfolded to his friends the things about himself.

[7 : 54] And Luke tells us he unfolded in all the scriptures. He doesn't say he unfolded in Genesis 3 and Isaiah 9 and Isaiah 53, although doubtless he mentioned these passages.

He unfolded to them in all the scriptures, the things about himself. And our author here chooses to focus on Melchizedek. And Melchizedek, the priest, Melchizedek, this mysterious figure, and the title I've chosen is from one of our hymns, We Have a Priest.

So that's our starting point. Where do we find Christ in the Bible? The answer is everywhere. The second thing is this, the importance of Melchizedek is that God's salvation is always at work.

We know very well it was at work through Abraham. Abraham was chosen so that all the nations on the earth might be blessed. Paul reminds us we are children of Abraham, even if we're not ethnic descendants.

if we believe in the gospel, if we believe in Christ to whom Abraham pointed. But surely what Melchizedek is showing here is that even way back at the beginning of the Old Testament, others still heard the gospel and believed it.

[9 : 13] Abraham and Melchizedek have never heard of each other before. They had never met before. And yet, this strange figure comes on the pages of scripture called the priest of the most high God.

In other words, Melchizedek and Abraham are part of the same story which our author is going to talk about in chapter 11, by faith, by faith, by faith.

Now, I'm worried about where this passage comes. As I said, back in chapter 5, verse 10, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and then we could have jumped straight on to 613.

But instead, our author, we looked at this a few weeks ago, says, it's time to grow up. It's time to leave the nursery. It's time to stop fooling around in the shallows and strike out into the deep.

And now he's returning to this. Melchizedek. I thought Jeremiah was difficult. Often as we are going through Jeremiah, I struggled and struggled and struggled.

[10:18] But I must confess, my faith failed me when I came to Melchizedek. It's a hard nut to crack. And if you read the commentaries, they're filled with a great deal of information about who people thought Melchizedek was.

According to some commentators, he was actually Noah's son Shem. I'm not at all sure how that worked out because I lost the will to live at that point and couldn't be bothered to read the other passages.

Others, of course, argues an angel, perhaps Michael or Gabriel. Others that indeed he is a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God. Trouble is, of course, for all these things is chapter 7, verse 3 says, he resembles the Son of God.

Then it suddenly dawned on me, this passage is not about Melchizedek at all. This passage is about Jesus Christ, the great high priest, and Melchizedek is simply another illustration of how great Jesus is.

Remember what our author has done, he's greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than the tabernacle, greater than any one angel or human, greater than any institution, and now he is even greater than this man, Melchizedek.

[11:37] Remember who received this letter first, second or third generation Christians, not people who had been subjected to heresy and false teaching.

Some of the New Testament churches did suffer from that. If you read 1 John, 2 Peter, and the letters to the churches in Revelation, you find that. This church had been taught well for several generations.

So our author says in 13 verse 7, remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you. So you see, what he's saying here is, brothers and sisters, whether you're the Christians to whom this letter first came, or to us thousands of years later, Jesus is the great high priest who has gone into heaven.

General title of this series is Fixing Your Eyes on Jesus. How are you going to keep going? How are we going to keep persevering? How are we going to finish the race? We're going to do it because we have a priest.

Now let me say a number of things about the passage. What is this passage about? If it's not about Melchizedek, by the way, I'm not saying Melchizedek is not important.

[12:49] I hope you see the point I'm making. We're not going to learn the real meaning of this passage. We go on and on and on about theories about Melchizedek. First of all, this passage is about hope.

Chapter 6, verses 13 to 20. Now hope in the Bible is not longing in a futile way for something that's not going to happen like Newcastle winning the Premier League.

Now however much I may hope for that it's not going to happen. At least it's not going to happen in this present season. No, hope in the New Testament is certainty of something that's not yet happened but which will happen.

That's why the hope is an anchor of the soul. We'll come to that. Feelings come and go. Sometimes we feel excited and thrilled about Christ and the gospel. Other times our hearts are dead and cold. Other times we are tired and weary but the hope remains and he says two things about hope. First of all, the example of Abraham's faith and patience.

[14:00] Verse 13, God made a promise to Abraham. Now it's easy to read Abraham's story in the wrong way. You can read Abraham's story as a series of triumphs of faith, leaving our believing God when it seemed impossible.

If you read Abraham's story carefully, you're going to find phrases like this. After a long time, many years later, those experiences of God speaking to him were actually very rare.

God did not need to make an oath God said, when God desired, verse 17, to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise, the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath.

God did not need to make an oath because God's word is true. And as our author says, you cannot make an oath by someone lesser, greater than yourself.

You can only make an oath by someone greater than yourself. God has no one greater than himself. The point is, God did not make the oath because he needed the oath but because

Abraham did.

[15:19] God accommodated himself to Abraham's weakness, and to Abraham's faith, strong as it was, and God does exactly the same to us.

It's like your children say to you, do you promise this? And then, do you really promise this? Now, really promising is not different from promising.

But very often, when you're talking to children, you adapt your language to show that this is a promise which you're going to keep. Now, we sometimes do not keep our promises.

Sometimes because we can't. Sometimes because we've made extravagant promises. Other times, circumstances prevent us. With God, there is no such thing as circumstances preventing the promise being carried out.

Now, Abraham is very, very important to our author. And in chapter 11, Abraham is going to be the main figure in the history of faith. And notice, not just to Abraham, verse 19, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement.

[16:29] And words which you become tiresomely familiar with, we are not Abraham, but we have Abraham's God. God. And that is the point. Therefore, we have Abraham's promises.

And therefore, the oath made to Abraham is true for us, all of us who have fled for refuge to the great high priest. So, first of all, he says, we have hope because the God who deals with us is the same as the God who dealt with Abraham.

The God who brought Abraham through these crisis after crisis, time after time, we have the same God. And then the nature of hope itself, verse 19, it is an anchor of the soul.

Now, the soul in the Bible does not mean a disembodied entity inside us. The soul is us. The soul is you. The soul is me. This is an anchor for the whole person, a belief that, battered, bruised, we will reach it.

We will reach glory because of this hope, which is an anchor. It's not an anchor in shifting tides. The strongest anchor can break away if there is a strong enough wind and a fierce enough sea.

[17:44] This is in heaven itself. The picture here is in so much in Hebrews is the high priest goes into the most holy place on the day of atonement.

Christ has gone into that place and Christ has secured that place for us. Jesus and John puts it in a different way.

I go to prepare a place for you. If I go, I will come again and receive you to myself. So this is a passage about hope. Just as God cannot lie, Jesus can never fail.

Are we going to make it? The bad news is not in our own strength. The good news is because of the great high priest who loses none of his shape.

Because of that, our anchor will hold, as we've sung within the veil. Secondly, in verses 7, 1 to 9, this is about history. It's based on events that actually happened.

[18:47] I didn't take time to read Genesis 14. Perhaps you might like to read it later. After Abraham had defeated the king, confederation of kings, and rescued his nephew Lot, he meets this man Melchizedek, king of Salem, king of Jerusalem, blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave him tithes.

The only other mention of Melchizedek in the Old Testament is Psalm 110, a psalm about the king and the priest. You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

You see, there's acres of speculation about this man. But that really is to miss the point. This man is brought here to show us something very significant about Jesus the Son of God.

And if you look at verse 7, verse 3, he is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. We must not take that literally.

What it means is these are not mentioned. He comes onto the stage and he disappears from the stage. He has what you'd call in the theater, a walk on part. Now, you might say that's an argument from silence.

[20:02] Well, it is. But this silence is particularly deafening. This story comes in the book of Genesis, which is utterly dominated by genealogies. Everybody in Genesis has a genealogy.

Indeed, that's how the book is structured. The descendants of Adam, the descendants of Jacob, descendants of Esau, and so on. This man alone does not come with that kind of accreditation.

And that's vital. Because this man comes in from the outside. This man breaks into the stream of salvation history.

And because he comes in from the outside, it shows right at the very beginning that salvation is not going to be limited to a particular ethnic group.

That seems to me the point. After all, this man, as I say, probably maybe heard of Abraham, Abraham had maybe heard of him. But above all, he comes from the outside, and what's said about him is so brief that he can point to this in the Son of God.

[21 : 13] After all, this is what our author is saying in a much better known verse, isn't it, in chapter 13, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Looking at this more particularly next week, the gospel, the eternal gospel, is the same yesterday and today and forever. Melchizedek, Abraham, were not saved by a different gospel, saved by the same gospel as we are saved.

They saw it in the distance, didn't see it fully, but it was the same gospel. And this seems to me Melchizedek is pointing to the eternity of Christ. Salvation came when we could do nothing to help ourselves, when we were utterly lost, utterly helpless, utterly bound in sin.

Jesus, the Son of God, left his Father's throne above, so free, so infinite, his grace, emptied himself to all but love and bled for Adam's helpless race, as Wesley puts it.

So, Melchizedek points to the eternity of Christ. Not that Melchizedek is eternal, except that no doubt for long, like Abraham, he has rejoiced in the unveiled presence of the Christ to whom he pointed.

[22 : 27] And then the second point, it seems to me, is that Christ is greater than both Melchizedek and Abraham. And the argument sounds quite complicated, indeed, I mean, if you look at verse 9, you might, well, gulp, one might say that Levi himself paid tithes through Abraham, for he has sown the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

These are the kind of verses that make us sit up and think, of course, because they're not the way we would expect it to be put. And it saves us getting into our mind running into grooves.

Point surely of this whole section is that the Levitical priests, the tribe of the priesthood, were mortal. Point of verse 9, surely, is that passing generations, because they're passing generations, cannot have a permanent relationship.

There is only one who can. But, I want to emphasize, this is not a myth, this is not a legend, this is not speculation, this is a real incident that happened to real people, to Melchizedek and to Abraham.

Abraham. So, you see, this is about our faith rests on historical events. And that's the way the New Testament puts it, rests on historical events.

[23 : 53] Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised again according to the scriptures. He was raised again, the power of an endless life. And this obscure figure from the distant past, Melchizedek, is a pointer to that.

forever shows us that all through this life and beyond, Christ will be there for us. Think about that for a moment. Christ is there for us.

Do you feel isolated and lonely? Do you feel no one cares about you? Do you feel that you're always passed over? Jesus Christ is there for you.

Jesus Christ is there for me. And Jesus Christ needs it's not that Melchizedek points fully to him or Abraham points fully to him.

Where do we find Christ in the Old Testament? Everywhere. Individuals, institutions, wisdom, prophecy, poetry, all narrative, all these point to him.

[24 : 54] And like an hourglass, a metaphor, rather likely, it goes totally through Christ and then widens out again to the whole world. So it is about hope.

it's about history. But thirdly, in the rest of the chapter, verses 11 to 28, it is about help in time of need.

You see, it's rooted in history. You say, well, that was long ago, but what about today? It's about help in time of need. Now, the ancient priests, verse 11, could not achieve perfection.

Now, remember, perfection in Hebrews essentially means the fulfillment of God's purposes. First of all, we have promise, we have fulfillment, and the word that the author uses is perfection.

But, you must remember, they were genuine object lessons of God's grace, of God's faithfulness. It wasn't that they were totally misleading.

[26 : 01] it wasn't. They were there to point us to Christ. They're limited, of course, and that's why we need eternal priesthood. So, one or two things here. First of all, Christ can help us at all times.

The Levites needed to be in the right family, and in that sense, it was limited. You had to be a Levite, or you could not be a priest. And they also had to, they weren't able to start until they were 30, and they had to retire at 50.

I'm so glad I wasn't a Levite. So, they started, and obviously that limits it from a particular family, a particular time span.

But now, our author quotes from the other passage about Melchizedek, in verse 15, 17, sorry, it is witness of him, you're a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Psalms 110, Psalm of the Messiah, Psalm of the Biddick King, who is also a priest. You see, once again, the two images coming together. The others were set aside because they died.

[27 : 10] They were no longer able to continue, or because they reached the age of 50, and then had to retire. See, as we'll see next week, the old covenant was right for its time and organically linked to the new covenant.

But this is a better hope, one which finds its fulfillment in Jesus. That's why, because he can help us at all times, there is never a time or a place where we cannot reach him.

That's why prayer, not so much set times of prayer, which are important, but conversational prayer with the Lord, is so important. Particularly if you're doing things that don't require all attention, walking to work, taking the train to work, doing the dishes, all these kind of things, where it's possible to be in touch with the great high priest day by day.

So he can help us at all times. He is always for us. You see, once again, the oath, verse 20, was not without an oath.

For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, but this one was made priest with an oath by the one who said to him, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you're a priest forever.

[28 : 25] This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. Imagine those ancient priests. Very often the people would get very close to them.

They would benefit from their ministrations sins, and then perhaps they would have to retire or they would die. There would be an inevitable sense of sadness.

But this priest is able, verse 25, to save to the uttermost. I want us to reflect on that word for a moment, save to the uttermost.

What does that mean? However sinful you have been, however badly you got it wrong, however many mistakes you've made, however you have messed things up, he is able to save to the uttermost.

And this word save is not just the initial conversion but the daily saving. Theologians talk about the three tenses of salvation, having been saved in the past, our initial coming to Christ, being saved moment by moment, and finally saved on the last day when our salvation is complete.

[29 : 38] And how is that shown? Verse 25 again, Consequently he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.

At this moment, Jesus Christ is interceding for us before the Father's throne. Interceding for us when we fall, when we sin, when we find it difficult to pray, when we are crushed and bruised, when we are happy, there is not a moment, he is not interceding for us.

I think about it on the last day when we stand before the throne of God. Just imagine the accusing voice. What's she doing here? Why is he here?

I know lots about him and I know lots about her. Why is she here? Why is he here? the voice that answers is the voice of the great high priest.

Father, she is here. Father, he is here because she is my child, because I have died for her, loved her, and cared for her.

[30 : 47] So he would help us at all times. He's always there for us and his sacrifice is perfect.

We're going to come on to that particularly in chapters 8 and 9. but here, verse 27, he had no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people.

Notice two differences. The ancient sacrifices had to be repeated and the priest, including the high priest, had to offer sacrifices for himself as well as for the people.

This one sacrifice can never be repeated and nothing can be added to it. And that's why we can have confidence in our salvation.

It has been once for all. Never again will he have to die. The law appoints, verse 28, men, their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath appoints a son who has been made perfect

forever.

Now that does not mean that Jesus Christ lacked perfection. What it means is that he has brought the whole work of God to completion. It's not complete at the moment.

[32 : 03] I mean, to use another illustration, the church of God is more like a building site than a show house at the moment. It's messy, there's rubble, there's confusion, but one day it will be a glorious church.

That's the point. And he will perfect one day. He will make us like his glorious body. And notice he is priest as well as sacrifice.

He is the sacrifice and the altar. He is also the priest who offers the sacrifice. So you see, as we close, our author is saying to the Christians then and to the Christians now, this is the only real way in which we can hope to persevere.

We cannot hope to persevere simply by trying a bit harder, which does not mean, of course, that we use that ridiculous phrase that used to be used a lot, let go and let God, because that's going to the opposite extreme.

Because after all, God expects us to grow in grace and holiness. But this motive will help us to persevere when Satan tempts me to despair, tells me of the guilt within.

[33 : 17] I look to heaven and see him there who made an end of all my sin. It also shows us the right way to read the Old Testament. We're not going to understand the Old Testament.

We simply say it's ancient Jewish religion. So important. What we have in the Old Testament is not the Jewish gospel. What we have is the one gospel. The apostle John calls the eternal gospel. Made perfect. And this is going to be picked up in chapter 11 verse 40 where the author is talking about the whole people of God. And he says this, God has provided something better for us that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Which does not of course mean that we are so much better than Moses and Abraham and all the Old Testament saints. It means that together as the one people of God Christ will present us a glorious church.

The salvation of the whole people of God BC and AD is in Christ alone. Because ultimately the gospel is not about Christ.

[34 : 22] The gospel is Christ. The great high priest was not only gone ahead but is also alongside to help. And this is the hope we have as an anchor of the soul.

Amen. Let's pray. These are deep waters, waters to swim in, and yet we thank you for the basic simplicity of the message that we have a great high priest who has gone into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God.

So help us, Lord, to look to him, to fix our eyes on him, to lay aside the sin and the weights which pull us down, and to run the race, and by your grace finish it, because not only is he seated at your right hand, he is alongside to help us, and we thank you for this, in his name.

Amen.